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TEACHING THE RED CROSS CLASSES

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When I was called to teach the home nursing work to four classes of twenty members each at Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa, my first thought was a wonder as to how I would present the work so that these young women with their trained minds would feel repaid for the time spent in the work. Much of it would be elemental, I thought, to women who had spent four years in college, so I ran over the work with a view to getting an outline of it in my own mind and also to see how I could vitalize it and connect it with their every day life.

At the first meeting I outlined a plan for having a bulletin board to which students were asked to bring any notice of anything that was in any way related to the subject of hygiene or public health; notices of changes in the water supply, or sewage systems of a town, of the employment of a school nurse by a community, of the discovery of a disease carrier, or outbreaks of epidemics in communities. The board was soon covered with clippings as varied as the account of the spread of anthrax, through hair brought in from China, and the refusal of an undertaker in a western town to contribute longer to the salary of a visiting nurse, "Because since she came there are fewer baby funerals." Any discussion of the milk supply of a city, or of methods used to combat local epidemics of children's diseases were posted on the board, and seldom a day passed without an added contribution.

Every lesson started with a short quiz on the work that we had already gone over. Every chapter was covered as quickly as possible and then the important points were emphasized.

Instead of finding it hard to stretch each chapter out over an hour and a half, as I had at first expected it would be, I found that there was so much to be discussed, all within the confines of the text, that the class hours were never long enough. Some of the subdivisions of the chapters would have furnished material for hours and hours of work. The students found the insight into occupational diseases full of fascination, and they were quick to see that working conditions surrounding people as far away as New York were of the deepest concern to them.

The chapter on the house was made interesting by showing that the standard of living depends largely upon income, and this directed their thoughts toward minimum wage scales and laws relating to labor. It was easy to get them to see the danger from garments,

cigars, or other articles of commerce manufactured under insanitary conditions; this gave them an interest in the conditions under which people work.

The chapter on sewage and garbage was made intensely interesting by a brief account of Mary McDowell's attempts to change the garbage system of the city of Chicago, and of her inability to get the law makers to pay any attention to her plans until after the women of Illinois were given the franchise.

The chapter on health and welfare presented an opportunity of explaining the ramifications of our federal, state, and local agencies for the protection of health and life.

In order to make these things concrete, some member of each class was asked to explain the system by which water was supplied to the town, another told of the method of disposing of the garbage, still another traced the sewage to the gulf. The pupils were asked to bring in information concerning the organizations that looked after the health problems of the community; the names and duties of their board of health, etc.

Hypothetical questions were given such as: "What would you do if you were to discover that your milkman had tuberculosis?" "What would you do if your grocer continually left his wares exposed to dust and flies?" or "What would you do if you knew you had been exposed to diphtheria and your throat were sore?" We tried to work out practical solutions to all of these problems as they came up in the class room and I really think that making of these lessons something that was personal added to the interest of the class hour, and to the understanding of the subject.

I tried to show that these problems of hygiene and sanitation are not merely class-room subjects to be dismissed after the hour is ended, but that they are related to every activity of life. The chapters on sanitation in the home appealed to the housekeeping instincts in every young woman, and when politics was presented to them in the light of being just public housekeeping, all saw the logic of equal suffrage.

While I was trying to present the subject matter of our text book in all of its larger aspects, the practical details were not neglected by any means; the pupils learned to make beautiful beds. Many of them went to our class room in the gymnasium, every spare minute, and practised bed making, lifting, changing a bed patient's position, and the use of the various appliances for adding to a patient's comfort. It was no unusual sight to see several girls upon the campus, busily engaged in making heel cushions, until they were so firm and smooth as to be a joy. They discussed the lessons and searched the daily

papers for contributions to our bulletin board. Among the eighty girls who made up the various classes, none ever brought in a contribution that was not apropos to the subject matter.

It was impossible to arrange the schedule of the classes so as to avoid having some of them in the evening, and many times as we came together for an evening's work the sound of the young men drilling on the campus came in at the open windows. The quiet enthusiasm and the serious intelligent questions of the students proved that they realized that the young men drilling out there on the campus had one part to play in the great drama of democracy and that they had another and no less real part in that struggle, which will see its real beginning after German autocracy has been crushed and the reconstruction period begins for the world.

In this experience I feel that I gained far more than I gave, and the thought of these eighty young women, going out into as many communities with their ideals, their training and their rich enthusiasm, ready to coöperate with other groups that are struggling to improve local conditions, is a thrilling one.

I feel that it would be a good plan to have these courses continued in times of peace as well as war. Some one in every household ought to know how to make a patient comfortable in a minor illness, or how to act as an intelligent aid to a trained nurse in more serious cases. Finally, the course itself may be made rich in cultural value, it may be used to broaden and deepen purely parochial viewpoints into national ones, by showing that our nation is, after all, like a huge mosaic, whose beautiful pattern, far from being one solid mass, is made up of tiny particles, which if flawed and scarred, would mar the whole design. Each little village may retain its own individuality, its own color, yet at its points of contact with the whole, it must show a continuity of purpose, a mutuality of interest that will cement it to its neighboring communities and through them to the whole fabric of national life. Any agency that hastens the attainment of this ideal is of permanent value.

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